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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENGDU 000249

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SUBJECT: SOUTHWEST CHINA: CONVERSATIONS WITH LOCAL COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBERS

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CLASSIFIED BY: James A. Boughner, Consul General, U.S. Consulate General, Chengdu.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During recent discussions with ConGenOff in the Sichuan provincial capital of Chengdu, several Communist Party members shared their frustrations about local Party organizations. The head of a state enterprise complained of the emptiness of the Party's concept of "democracy" and the difficulty of implementing reforms in China because of a lack of rule of law. A physician involved in earthquake relief remarked on continued official distrust and skepticism of the work of NGOs. A common vent appeared to be on the Party's enthusiasm for collecting membership dues. End Summary.

The State Enterprise Party Secretary

¶2. (C) The General Manager and Party Secretary of a state enterprise that builds communications infrastructure in Sichuan told ConGenOff he is responsible for leading senior party members at the monthly "Party Democratic Life" meetings where work self-criticisms are conducted. He remarked that people are afraid to say anything significant lest they be among those included in the "next layoffs." Meeting discussions are highly abstract and distant from reality. When ConGenOff mentioned the "people's democratic dictatorship" principle that enshrines the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the Party Secretary stated that democracy has no real meaning in that context although the word is much used.

¶3. (C) According to the Party Secretary, although China tries to import advanced practices and new ideas from the United States and other countries, without the rule of law that is part of the foreign package, deep reforms cannot take hold. He is frustrated many of his colleagues and employees oppose significant change to the current system. As an aside, he also commented that he "loves" Tibetan culture and believes Tibetans to be peaceful and the most spiritually developed of any people in the world.

The Physician

¶4. (C) A doctor at a large Chengdu hospital who also runs an NGO involved in earthquake relief complained to ConGenOff of his frustration that provincial authorities remain skeptical of NGOs. Sichuan officials prefer to work with government sponsored "NGOs" (GONGOs) rather than citizen founded and organized groups. When ConGenOff mentioned that, according to a recent local newspaper, the Standing Committee of the Sichuan

People's Congress has agreed to support some NGO health activities, the physician asserted, "That is only for the GONGOs, not for us." ConGenOff asked the physician if his hospital's Party Secretary might be able to give him advice on how to get government offices to work better with his NGO and perhaps facilitate introductions. The physician smiled, and said, "If our Party secretaries were like that, China would be a much more democratic country!" He added that the Party organization he reports to only cares that he pays his dues and noted he joined the Party like many of his former fellow students while he was in medical school without giving it much thought.

The Retired Ideological Minder

15. (C) A recently retired member of the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) told ConGenOff he used to be responsible on behalf of the Communist Party for watching over the political views of his colleagues. He said the basic problem of Chinese politics is that officials in each of the many layers of government and Party are very worried about what higher authorities think about them, but do not feel responsible to the lower layers. This in turn breeds great "passivity."

The Tour Guide

16. (C) A tour guide complained to ConGenOff about the large contributions his Party organization demanded from all members after the Sichuan earthquake. All Party members were ordered to contribute several hundred RMB to earthquake relief. The tour guide said he has wanted to leave the Party for some time, but that, "The Party is easy to enter but hard to leave." "If you want to leave the Party," he said, "they will keep asking you why, why, why. It is hard to leave."

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17. (C) Comment: While it is of course difficult to assert to what extent the comments of the four individuals who were willing to talk with ConGenOff are reflective of the views of others, these were nevertheless interesting and refreshingly open encounters with local Communist Party members.
BOUGHNER